

# Shrewsbury High School

## Class Rank Committee

### Report

### Fall 2016

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### **I. Summary**

The class rank study group met during the 2015-2016 school year to investigate the use of class rank as it relates to college admission. The committee specifically looked to determine how admissions offices use class rank in granting student admission to college/university, and to further determine if calculating class rank could be detrimental to the admissions success of SHS students.

After reviewing the current trends in class rank reporting throughout Massachusetts high schools, examining acceptance guidelines at private and public colleges and universities, and, gathering student and community feedback, we have come to the conclusion that Shrewsbury High School should eliminate the practice of reporting class rank to colleges and universities.

The Class Rank Committee conducted research of over thirty comparable public and private high schools in Massachusetts to better understand their rationale for doing away with class rank or continuing to report class rank. Our research revealed that no private school studied, calculated or reported class rank to colleges or universities. The Committee also found that the vast majority of comparable public schools have moved away from reporting class rank, and most have done so in the last fifteen years. Additionally, seven of the top ten schools in Massachusetts, (as ranked by *US News and World Report*), did not report class rank. While our findings do not indicate a causal link between the elimination of class rank and high-performing high schools, there is a growing trend of schools moving away from the practice.

College and university admissions offices are accepting of the move away from the reporting of the class rank metric. The Class Rank Committee contacted over fifteen colleges and universities to ascertain the importance of class rank in a student's application. In addition, the Committee examined numerous reports from the National Association of College Admissions Counseling (NACAC) to reveal national trends. Based on the research conducted, none of the colleges

contacted stated that class rank was required, and only a few stated that they preferred to have access to the metric. The resounding message from the colleges was the absence of student's class rank on a transcript would not diminish a student's chances of being admitted. In fact, the Committee found that some colleges and universities indicated nearly two-thirds of admitted students came from schools that did not report class rank. These findings are supported by the information presented in several annual NACAC reports. The most recent "State of College Admission" survey indicated the importance of class rank as a "considerable" criterion for college admissions fell from a high of 42% in 1993, to a low of 15.2% in 2013. Instead of admissions being significantly based on one metric, colleges are moving toward an increasingly holistic approach to admissions. The overwhelming trend in college admissions is the decreasing importance of class rank as an important factor in college admissions.

In addition to conducting research, the Class Rank Committee also sought feedback from students and the Shrewsbury community. Upon reviewing the Committee's findings, the SHS School Council concurred that eliminating class rank would lead to increased acceptance to colleges and universities. In early March, students were surveyed to gather their opinions on the importance of reporting class rank and its potential elimination. The survey revealed that an overwhelming majority (70%) of the student body favored an end to the practice of reporting class rank to college and universities. The strongest support (75%) came from the class of 2017, who would be most immediately impacted by a change in practice. The research and findings of the Committee's work were presented to parents at an open forum meeting one evening in April. The discussion about the elimination of class rank and its impact on college admission provided parents a greater understanding of the reasoning behind the proposed shift and garnered support of this recommendation.

## **II. Methodology:**

Over the course of the 2015-2016 school year, the class rank study group met monthly and conducted research on the following:

1. Past and current class rank reporting practices at SHS
2. The issues associated with reporting class rank
3. College admissions office use of class rank
4. College admissions office views on the importance of class rank
5. Comparable high schools' practices for reporting or not reporting of class rank
6. Student, staff, parent, and community perception and understanding on the use of class rank and the benefits of reporting vs. not reporting

### **1. Past and Current Practice**

Prior to the 2006-2007 school year, Shrewsbury High School numerically ranked students on the final transcript. A student's exact class rank was listed (For example the valedictorian's transcript read: *1 out of 400*, the salutatorian's transcript read: *2 out of 400*, and so on down the line). During the 2006-2007 school year, the SHS administration made the decision report a

student's percentile rank, as this was the trend and the expectation of colleges and universities at that time.

### **Shrewsbury High School's current class rank policy:**

Students' official percentile rank is based on a weighted grade point average according to the table below. Percentile rank is calculated at the end of the sixth semester (end of junior year). It is recalculated at the end of the seventh semester (middle of senior year) and eighth semester (end of senior year). Only those classes taken at Shrewsbury High School are included in class rank; students must be enrolled at Shrewsbury High School for at least two consecutive semesters to be included in class rank. Class rank is calculated from the total number of quality points a student earns. The grade received in a course and the level of the course determines quality points. All classes in grades 9-12 are counted toward a student's GPA.

Shrewsbury High School currently reports class percentile rank in two ways. A percentile rank appears on the student's transcript. Additionally, school counselors report a decile rank for each student on the Secondary School Report, sent to colleges with their application materials.

### **Course Level/Values and Weight Table**

<b>Course Levels/ Quality Points</b>			
<b>Grade</b>	<b>AP</b>	<b>Honors</b>	<b>A- Level</b>
A+	5.7	5.2	4.7
A	5.3	4.8	4.3
A-	5	4.5	4
B+	4.7	4.2	3.7
B	4.3	3.8	3.3
B-	4	3.5	3
C+	3.7	3.2	2.7
C	3.3	2.8	2.3
C-	3	2.5	2
D+	2.7	2.2	1.7
D	2.3	1.7	1.3
D-	2	1.5	1
F	0	0	0

### **2. Issues associated with Class Rank:**

Class rank is designed to compare the success of one student to the success of another student within his own class and school. Colleges, however, frequently use class rank to compare students from different schools. This cross-school comparison assumes that all schools are equal

in terms of rigor, school programming, and student performance. This is frequently not the case. For example, a student from Shrewsbury High School may be in the top 30% of his class while a student from a neighboring town's high school with the same GPA might be in the top 20% of his class. Students from Shrewsbury High School may have a lower class rank than a student from a neighboring high school, but a higher GPA. This is problematic when applying to colleges that use a formulaic approach to admissions decisions. While class rank does not automatically grant admittance to a college or university, it can automatically eliminate a student from consideration for admission, or admission to a special program within the college or university, such as an honors college or specialized major/program. For example, a student who looks to seek admission to an honors program must be in the top 10% of his graduating class. A student in School A could be in the top 10% of their class have a 3.7 GPA, while a student in school B could have a 3.9 GPA, but be ranked in the top 15% of the class. Colleges and Universities can and have used student rank as a sorting mechanism to eliminate potentially qualified candidates without consideration for the strength of a school's program or relative strength of the student body.

Because of the savvy nature of Shrewsbury High School students and parents, reporting class rank forces families to consider class rank when making educational decisions like selecting classes. The committee believes that not reporting class rank to colleges and universities would allow students to explore a greater variety of course offerings at the high school and allow interest to be the guiding force in that decision, rather than the impact it would have on one's class rank.

### 3. College Admissions Offices Use of Class Rank

<b>College/University</b>	<b>Is class rank required for admission?</b>	<b>Relevant information</b>
Cornell University	No	72.5% of admitted students did not provide rank
University of Vermont	No	63% of admitted students did not provide rank
Brandeis University	No	Well over half of admitted students did not provide rank
Columbia University	No	'Columbia uses a holistic review process when evaluating applicants for admission; admission to Columbia is not based on a simple formula of grades and test scores.'
University of Connecticut	Like to see it	Rigor of transcript is used first, then grades in those courses. Some kind of grade distribution is helpful for determining scholarship and Honors College qualification
Brown University	Like to see it	If rank is not provided, a grade distribution chart is beneficial and would be used when reviewing an applicant
Boston College	No	Rank is only looked at in the context of that student's school. 'Plenty of our applicants come from schools that do not provide rank'. Rigor of transcript and grades are paramount. Test scores next.
Assumption College	No	60% of admitted students did not provide rank
Northeastern University	No	Performance in high school is the most deciding factor-a competitive schedule with good grades. Test scores next.
College of the Holy Cross	Like to see it	Prefer to have some idea of where a student stands in their class.
WPI	No	Rigor of curriculum is preferred; could be considered for scholarship if student is #1 or #2 in class-reported from the counselor is sufficient.
Drexel University	No	Rank is not the first thing looked at for a student. If a school provides it, it's just one more piece of data. If not, a more holistic approach is used. Grade distribution is helpful.

Dartmouth College	No	65% of admitted students did not provide rank
Johns Hopkins University	No	Rigor of secondary school record and grades are primary focus.
Boston University	No	'A majority of applicants apply with no rank reported'

Parents and students may wonder then, why colleges continue to ask for rank on applications. With a majority of the colleges we polled, class rank in any form is simply used as another piece of data to help describe a student, as are other Standardized test scores, grades, and strength of program/course load, and other criteria. Some colleges report that they “like to see it” for very competitive programs, scholarship consideration, or for Honors College qualification. However, those same **colleges stated that they cannot eliminate a candidate from consideration if they do not report rank because so many high schools are not reporting class rank information.** By not reporting class rank there is greater flexibility for admissions offices to accept students based on students transcript, activities, standardized test scores (SAT/ACT), and letters of recommendation.

When rank is not reported, some colleges may attempt to estimate a student’s class rank given the information provided. The majority of colleges and universities, however, will focus on other elements of a student’s profile, including transcript, student essay, letter of recommendation, student co-curricular activities, test scores and/or interviews. In addition, colleges are provided the student’s weighted GPA and school counselors can emphasize and highlight a student’s academic strengths and potential in the letter of recommendation.

#### **4. College admissions office views on the importance of class rank**

According to the 2007 National Association of College Admissions Counseling (NACAC) *Research to Practice Brief: Class Rank*, colleges admitting less than 50% of applicants, view class rank of “considerable importance” 31% of the time. However, colleges accepting over 85% of applicants find class rank to be of “considerable importance” only 20% of the time. This suggests that class rank is valued slightly more at more selective institutions, but this could be the result of other factors. One such factor is an attempt by some selective colleges to improve their academic profile by targeting and recruiting students in the top ranks of their class. This improves the college/university applicant and acceptance metrics that are then used for marketing purposes. While many selective schools may desire class rank for this reason, the vast majority have indicated that non-ranked students do not harm the school’s academic profile and therefore would not hinder a student’s chances of being admitted.

According to the annual surveys of colleges conducted by NACAC, the importance of class rank in college admissions has declined significantly since 1993. The most recent State of College Admission survey released by NACAC indicates that class rank is of “considerable importance” to only 15.2% colleges in 2013, down from 42% in 1993.

Table 1

**Table 3. Percentage of colleges attributing “considerable importance” to factors in the admission decision: 1993 to 2006**

	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Grades in college prep/ strength of curriculum <sup>1</sup>	82%	83%	80%	78%	81%	79%	84%	78%	80%	76%	78%	80%	74%	--
Grades in college prep	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	76
Strength of curriculum	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	62
Admission test scores	46	43	47	48	50	51	54	58	52	57	61	60	59	60
Grades in all courses	39	37	41	38	41	44	42	43	45	50	54	57	54	51
Essay	14	17	21	20	18	19	19	20	20	19	23	25	23	28
Class rank	42	40	39	36	34	32	32	34	31	35	33	28	31	23
Counselor rec.	22	20	19	17	20	16	18	16	17	16	17	18	17	21
Demonstrated interest	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	7	7	15	21
Teacher rec.	21	19	18	19	19	16	14	14	16	14	18	18	17	20
Interview	12	12	15	13	11	11	9	11	11	10	9	9	9	10
Extracurricular activities/work <sup>2</sup>	6	6	7	6	6	4	5	7	6	7	7	8	8	--
Extracurricular activities	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	8
Work	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	3
Subject tests (AP, IB)	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	6	7	5	7	8
State exams	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	6	7	6	7	6
SAT II scores	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	5

-- Data are not available.

<sup>1</sup> On the 2006 survey, grades in college prep courses and strength of curriculum were listed as two separate factors. In previous years, one factor was listed as grades in college prep courses/strength of curriculum.

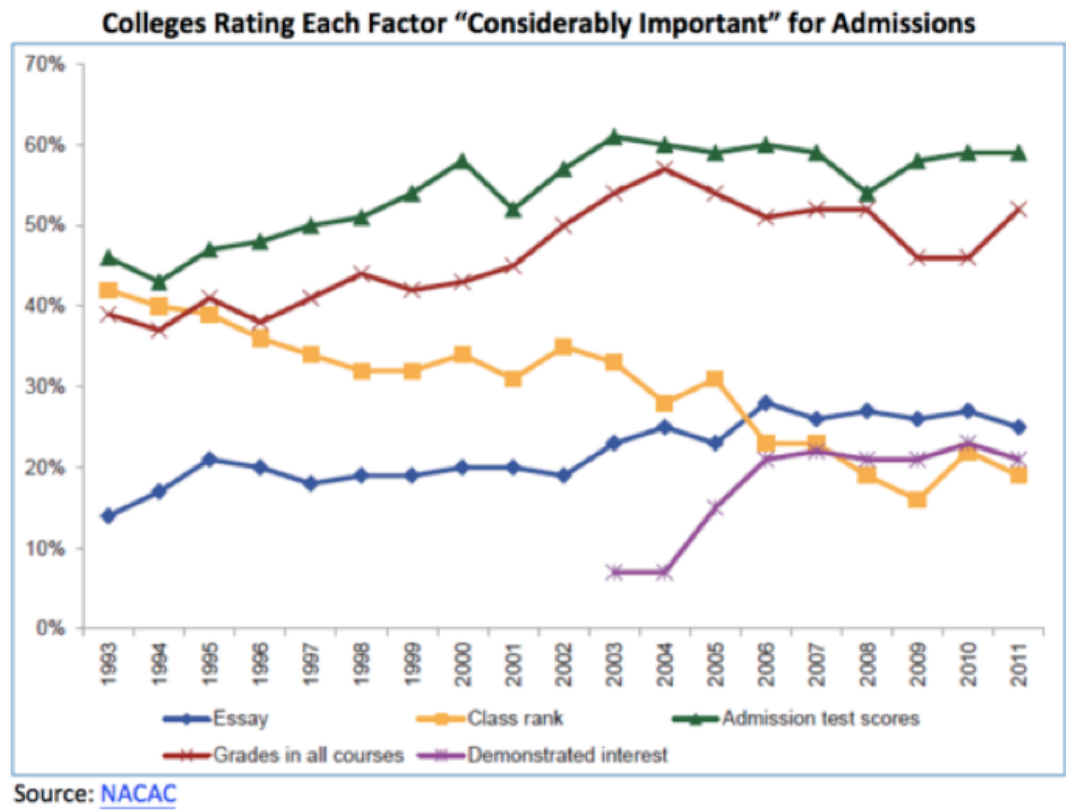
<sup>2</sup> On the 2006 survey, extracurricular activities and work were listed as two separate factors. In previous years, one factor was listed as work/extracurricular activities.

SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Surveys, 1993 through 2006.

Source: NACAC Research to Practice Brief on Class Rank from 2007



Table 2



Source: Hanover Research's article "The Changing Role of Class Rank in College Admissions"

Table 3

Table 16. Percentage of colleges attributing different levels of importance to factors in the admission decision: 2013

Factor	Considerable importance	Moderate importance	Limited importance	No importance
Grades in college prep courses	81.5%	10.4%	7.4%	7%
Strength of curriculum	63.7	24.8	8.1	3.3
Admission test scores (SAT, ACT)	58.3	29.5	10.0	2.2
Grades in all courses	51.5	37.4	8.9	2.2
Essay or writing sample	22.2	37.8	22.6	17.4
Student's demonstrated interest	20.1	34.0	23.9	22.0
Counselor recommendation	15.9	43.9	24.7	15.5
Class rank	15.2	35.3	33.5	16.0
Teacher recommendation	14.1	43.9	28.3	13.8
Extracurricular activities	9.6	40.6	33.9	15.9
Interview	7.8	21.2	27.9	43.1
Subject test scores (AP, IB)	7.5	30.6	32.5	29.5
Portfolio	6.4	9.4	34.3	49.8
SAT II scores	6.0	10.9	23.7	59.4
State graduation exam scores	3.4	10.1	28.4	58.2
Work	2.6	17.1	51.3	29.0

Source: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2013.

Source: NACAC 2014 State of College Admissions report

## **5. How other schools handle class rank:**

As of the 2015-2016 school year, the following is just a small sampling of comparable high schools in Massachusetts that do not report class rank. Parenthetical notations indicate the year each school stopped reporting rank.

- Acton-Boxborough (2012)
- Andover High School (2009)
- Concord-Carlisle Regional High School (1997)
- Dover-Sherborn Regional High School (2002)
- Duxbury High School (2006)
- Hingham High School (2006)
- Hopkinton High School (1999)
- Lincoln-Sudbury Regional High School (2004)
- Nashoba Regional HS (2013)
- Newton North High School (2011)
- Newton South High School (2010)
- Wachusett Regional High School (2015)
- Wayland High School (2011)
- Wellesley High School (2004)
- Westborough High School (2006)
- Westford Academy (2007)
- Weston High School (2003)
- Westwood High School (2003)

In addition, of the top ten schools in Massachusetts by the *US News and World Report*, the following do not report class rank:

- #1 Sturgis Charter Public School
- #2 Boston-Latin School
- #4 Advanced Math and Science Academy Charter School
- #5 Lexington High School
- #6 Belmont High School
- #9 Dover-Sherborn Regional High School
- #10 Sharon High School

## **6. Process for garnering feedback from constituents:**

On February 9, 2016, the research from the Class Rank Committee was presented at the SHS School Council Meeting. When the topic of eliminating the reporting class rank to colleges was initially presented, members of the school council were skeptical of the proposal because of the long-term history of reporting rank at Shrewsbury High School. However, after the research was

presented and discussed, members were unanimously in favor eliminating the reporting of class rank to colleges and universities to potentially increase student opportunity for college admissions and programming.

On February 23, 2016 members of the Class Rank Committee presented the research and information to the staff at a monthly faculty meeting. After the presentation the staff participated in a question and answer session. The faculty indicated its support for the elimination reporting of class rank to colleges and universities.

On March 1, 2016, the high school conducted an online survey to gather student feedback as to whether they support or oppose the elimination of reporting class rank to colleges and universities. The survey was conducted during a homeroom period and provided a brief overview of the current policy and then outlined the proposed changes if the reporting of class rank was no longer a practice at the high school. Of the 83% of the student body that participated in the survey, 69.7% of students across grade levels supported the elimination of class rank. In addition, the class that would be most immediately impacted by a change in reporting procedures, the Class of 2017, was most supportive of the policy change with 74.9% of students favoring the elimination of class rank. While the class of 2016 showed the least support for the policy change, 59.6%, it is important to note that the Class of 2016 had the lowest levels of participation in the survey, and is the only class that would not be impacted by a change in reporting. While the reason for the different levels of support for a shift in reporting between the Classes of 2016 and 2017 is not entirely clear, both clearly demonstrated that a majority of the class would support a change in our current practice.

**Should SHS Eliminate the Reporting of Class Rank to Colleges and Universities Beginning in the 2016-2017 School Year?**

	<b>"Yes"</b>	<b>"No"</b>	<b>Percent Participating</b>
<b>Class of 2019 (Freshmen)</b>	73.2%	26.8%	90.1%
<b>Class of 2018 (Sophomores)</b>	69.2%	30.8%	88.1%
<b>Class of 2017 (Juniors)</b>	74.9%	25.1%	82.8%
<b>Class of 2016 (Seniors)</b>	59.6%	40.4%	70.3%
<b>Total</b>	69.7%	30.3%	83.0%

On April 4, 2016 members of the Class Rank Committee conducted an evening presentation for any interested parents. The group shared information with parents and then held a group discussion to answer parent questions and concerns.

### **III. Recommendation**

The Class Rank Committee recommends the elimination of the reporting class rank to colleges and universities. This change would entail the elimination of percentile rank on the SHS transcript. The weighted grade point average would continue to be reported on the transcript and to colleges.

### **IV. Timeline for change**

Shrewsbury High School will eliminate the practice of reporting class rank to colleges and universities beginning in the 2016-2017 school year.

### **V. Impact on Class Valedictorian and Class Salutatorian**

The Class Rank Committee recommends no current change to the policy of determining the class valedictorian and class salutatorian. Calculation of the valedictorian and salutatorian is based on the top two highest weighted grade point averages. In order to be considered for Valedictorian and/or Salutatorian students must be enrolled as a Shrewsbury High School student for 8 consecutive semesters. Final determination of these distinctions will be made at the conclusion of quarter 3 of students' senior year.

### **VI. Eliminating percentile rank reporting and the effect on the top students at Shrewsbury High School**

Members of the Committee asked college admissions counselors if the elimination of reporting percentile rank would affect admission of the highest performing students at SHS. The response from admissions offices was overwhelmingly consistent: There is no negative impact on an applicant whose school does not report class rank.

### **VII. Impact on Scholarship Considerations**

An important consideration in the elimination of reporting class rank to colleges is the impact of a student's ability to qualify for scholarships. Due to the number of high schools that are no longer reporting rank, colleges have responded in kind. For instance, at the University of New Hampshire, the wording for the criteria that included rank for the presidential scholarship at UNH states, "Rank in top 10% of graduating class (or equivalent level of unranked schools as determined by GPA and/or information on the school profile)." Many college/university merit based scholarships have adjusted their criteria based on GPA, SAT/ACT, and other criteria as determined by individual institutions.

## **VIII. Social and Emotional Implications Associated with Class Rank**

Students and families that focus on hard statistics such as rank, GPA, and standardized test scores to gain admittance to highly selective schools often put great pressure on the student to choose a competitive course schedule and achieve at the highest grade possible in their classes. While the percentile rank is one factor in the student's academic record, it is calculated from the culmination of a student's academic performance and can create the personal pressure to achieve while fostering unhealthy competition with fellow students. Often, the pressure to perform and achieve academically is combined with a full complement of activities to build a strong student profile for colleges and universities leaving little time and energy for students to genuinely develop an interest and passion in their studies. As a result, a student's health and emotional well-being can be compromised. The School Counseling Department will continue to work with students and families to balance the pursuit of academic achievement and students' social and emotional health. The elimination of reporting class rank to colleges and universities may help mitigate some of the issues associated with both unhealthy internal and external pressures students face.

## **IX. Conclusion**

After reviewing the current trends in class rank reporting throughout Massachusetts high schools, examining acceptance guidelines at private and public colleges and universities, and, gathering student and community feedback, we have come to the conclusion that Shrewsbury High School should eliminate the practice of reporting class rank to colleges and universities.